

# **DITCH THAT TEXTBOOK!**

Teaching with  
less reliance on  
the textbook

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# INTRODUCTION

█ had never seen students run for the door so fast. When the bell rang that day early in my teaching career, it might as well have been a fire alarm. It was like they had springs in their seats.

We had just completed 48 minutes of fascinating lecture and practice questions from a high school Spanish textbook. (Fascinating might be a bit of a stretch.) The students weren't engaged and paying attention like I wanted them to, so I punished them with extra work to be done silently in their seats.

I hated the idea. I knew this couldn't be the best way to teach. It certainly wasn't who I wanted to become as a teacher: that guy that taught primarily by going from page 1 to the end of the textbook. (Actually, I wasn't even that guy because we only made it halfway through the book in a school year.)

I wanted my classes to be different.

I wanted them to be learning experiences.

I wanted my students to talk all the time in Spanish, to learn by doing.

Half-baked grammar exercises from a textbook weren't going to produce lifelong language speakers.

As of that day, I was sick of teaching from the textbooks. I wanted something better. For my students and for me.

My “ditch that textbook” path has been a winding one. There was lots of trial and error. Reading and talking about other people’s experiences. Trying to create learning opportunities that would pique my students’ interest.

Fast-forward to today. As of the writing of this book, I have been teaching without textbooks for four years. I still have textbooks. They’re just sitting on shelves in a locked cabinet in the back of my classroom.

My Spanish students are the most fluent speakers I've ever

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taught. They can have a real conversation with me without using any English. They have absorbed and now own the vocabulary, grammar structures and culture that they've been presented.

It was all done based on the principles set forth in this book.

I don't claim to be a curriculum expert or an instruction expert. Not all of my ideas are research-based and data-driven. But they have worked for me, and I know they can work for you. They are relevant for all subject areas on many levels.

You can do it. Let's take the first step now.

# **DITCHING YOUR CURRICULUM**

# CHARTING THE COURSE

**D**itching the textbook is all about purpose. What do you want to do with the powerful platform you've been given? Teachers have such enormous influence on their students.

It would be a shame if we missed that valuable opportunity because we didn't have a plan. Benjamin Franklin famously said, "He who fails to plan is planning to fail."

The fundamental concept is the reverse curriculum planning that's the foundational element in college curriculum design programs. Start with the end in mind. Then work your way backward.

Answer some of these questions about yourself: What kind of teacher are you? What do you want to be known for? Or, more importantly, what do you want your students to be known for?

Then, answer some questions about your students: What do you want them to be able to do at the end of the year? What skills do they need to develop for success? What discussions do they need to have to cultivate new ideas?

Teachers are like pilots in a way. Like pilots, teachers journey together with students from the same starting place to a fixed destination in the future. Teachers, like pilots, set the destination. They set the waypoints that must be crossed to arrive at the destination. The teacher, like the pilot, charts the appropriate course based on experience and knowledge. Students provide feedback and interaction like the warning lights and gauges of a plane.

Before a pilot taxis a plane to the runway, he must have a well designed plan in place. Teachers are no different. They

## **Answer these questions about yourself:**

- What kind of teacher are you?
- What do you want to be known for?
- What do you want your students to be known for?

need to know what they're going to teach, but they also need to know who they want to be.

Mission statements can be trite and forced, but I think they can serve an important purpose with teachers. Even if you don't have your mission statement etched in a plaque hanging above your desk in your classroom, it's good to know what you want to be.

Jessica Balsley of The Art of Education suggests these tips for writing a professional mission statement:

- Keep it under 30 words.
- Incorporate characteristics about yourself and ways you interact with others.
- In forming it, consider: "My perfect world is a place where ..."

As a high school Spanish teacher, I know that I want my students to be able to converse easily in Spanish. There are plenty of other important skills, too, like developing vocabulary, improving grammar, growing cultural understanding, etc.

For me, it's not that I want my students to forsake those skills in pursuit of sloppy spoken language. Fluid conversational Spanish is the stamp that I want to put on my teaching. When my students leave my classroom for the last time, I don't want them to freeze if someone walks up to them and says, "¿Cómo estás?" or "¿Dónde está la oficina?".

Knowing that I want my students to be good conversationalists guides everything I do as a Spanish teacher. I craft units that promote great opportunities to converse in Spanish. I plan lessons to hone my students' speaking and listening skills.

### **Tips for writing a professional mission statement:**

- Under 30 words
- Incorporate characteristics about yourself
- Incorporate ways you interact with others
- Consider: "My perfect world is a place where ..."

# CHOOSING YOUR WORD

An interesting way of creating a sense of purpose in your planning is to find your one word. That is, find the one word that describes what you want to be and what you want to happen in your classroom.

That's the educational twist on the premise of a book called "One Word That Will Change Your Life" by Dan Britton, Jimmy Page and Jon Gordon. Instead of setting new year's resolutions – 50 percent of which fail in a month, the authors claim – we could select a single word that embodies what we want an entire year of our life to mean.

The authors, who are leaders in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes organization, outline a process for selecting "the word" for a year in their free action plan:

1. Look in. Get somewhere quiet where you can focus and ask yourself three questions: What do I need? What's in my way? What needs to go?

2. Look up. As Christians, they suggest connecting with God, who reveals your word to you, through prayer and quiet time to reflect.

3. Live your word. Designate three ways to make sure you have regular reminders of your word. Share your word with three people that are close to you for accountability.

Selecting a precise word that describes the change you want to make in various areas of your teaching life – or your life in general – can be so simple and so powerful. It can become the lens that we use for viewing how we interact with our students, how we plan our lessons, how we deliver our teaching.

One year, even before I found the "One Word" book, I

## **Choosing your one-word mission statement:**

1. Look in.
2. Look up.
3. Live your word.

chose “love” as my word. I felt that I had good relationships with some of my students and that they enjoyed being in my class. But I knew that I could serve them better, as a teacher and as a human being.

I wanted to show love in little things: throw away scrap paper sitting on their desk or pick up pencils for them. I wanted to cheerfully greet them at the door more often. I also wanted to show love in bigger ways, like comforting students in tough times. I wanted to be that teacher that took an interest in them, learned enough about them to give them solid advice that was relevant to their lives.

I had some minor successes if you want to base success on visual evidence: the smiles, the gratefulness, the “thanks for taking the time.”

I’d imagine that the greater successes in my quest to love my students were the ones I never saw. I’m hopeful that I made someone with a rough home life feel noticed and appreciated for who they were.

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**In ditching your textbooks for your own way of teaching, think of curriculum planning like a pilot plans a flight.**

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## **SETTING WAYPOINTS**

Once your course is charted, it’s time to start some big-picture curriculum planning. In ditching your textbooks for your own way of teaching, think of curriculum planning like a pilot plans a flight. Flights need a destination, but often pilots don’t set their heading directly at the destination right away. If pilots want to avoid a thunderstorm or must fly around restricted airspace, their waypoints lead them on a safe path around those obstacles.

In planning, your destination is your mission statement. It’s who you are as a teacher and what you want your students to

achieve. Your waypoints to that destination are the major themes that the entire year's teaching is made of.

Determine what the major themes are that you plan to cover. Some of this may be up to your own desire. Some of it may be predetermined by national or state content standards. District or school policy may dictate some of it. Gather your must-haves so you can distribute them throughout your curriculum appropriately.

For me, in my Spanish classes, my major themes are my eight thematic units. I incorporate ideas like haves/needs/wants, vacations and being a student in Spanish 1. I use different themes all the way up to Advanced Placement Spanish, where they include the environment, health and education.

I can group all of the vocabulary, grammar and culture topics that I want to cover in those themes. The themes also give me conversation starters for classroom discussions in Spanish. Even Spanish 1 can describe their favorite vacation get-aways and the joys and perils of student life.

It's easy to neglect to plan for the meaningful discussions that we should have with our students about various topics in our classrooms. It's so easy to get focused on the nuts-and-bolts content and miss out on some of these gems of teaching. I often have to fight against the inner grammarian in me and get back to true conversation, sloppy sentences and all. That's the core of what I do as a teacher.

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# THE PRE-FLIGHT CHECKLIST

Landing gear. Wing flaps. Hydraulic systems. They all need to work properly before a plane heads to the runway. I'm no air travel expert, but I'm certain that someone assures that they all function properly before a massive jet carrying hundreds of passengers leaves the ground.

As teachers, we need our own pre-flight checklists. They're the skills we want our students to master. The information. The processes. The experiences. Textbooks set these up for us, but if we're ditching our textbooks, we can arrange, modify, take away from and add to the "pre-flight checklist" of skills for our classes as we see fit.

To ensure that a class becomes the learning experience we want it to be, we need multiple checklists. A good place to start is any applicable academic standards, policies or requirements, such as: state, national, Common Core, district/corporation, etc. These are the immutable laws of our classroom and should be a high priority.

Beyond the requirements, a second checklist is derived from our waypoints: our major curriculum themes. As you consider each of your themes, determine the skills to master, content to cover and experiences to have. A third checklist could include essential questions that should be answered or addressed during instruction.

In my world language classes, my instruction is based around grammatical structures, vocabulary terms and cultural insights from Spanish-speaking countries and people. As I restructured my classes to fully ditch my textbooks, I created my pre-flight checklists. I had a copy of my state world language standards handy. I worked through each of my major themes

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and listed the critical skills that students would need in each.

I often needed to modify themes as I listed the skills. For example, I usually taught the verb “to want” (querer) in a lesson about “e” to “ie” stem-changing verbs. But in my Spanish 1 theme of haves, wants and needs, I realized that I needed to break that verb away from its former lesson and teach it earlier in the year. I had never broken the content up that way before, but it made sense and made for a good theme-based unit. It worked, and I’ve stuck with it since.

In each of my theme-based units, I decided on a couple of essential questions that could be addressed throughout. I tried to form questions that really cut to the core of the topic. In my theme about why I am how I am, we addressed the following questions throughout the unit:

- What were my family and I like when I was young?
- How did others make me who I am now?

The questions weren’t exceptionally introspective, but they did allow for some interesting, thought-provoking conversations, and in Spanish no less. Because one of the target grammatical concepts was using a past tense – one I call the “used to” tense, we talked about how certain family members used to be or what they used to do as children. Those conversations led discussions on how the students are similar or different now and how they’re going to be in the future.

# WRITING THE FLIGHT PLAN

The destination is selected. The waypoints are set. The pre-flight checklist is complete. Now it's time to finalize the flight plan. Flight plans are the all-inclusive reports that include all sorts of factors affecting the flight. Weather. Altitudes. Sunrise and sunset. Estimated times of departure and arrival. It's all there.

The flight plan is similar to creating a unit plan and giving it some structure. It involves making a weekly list of activities and content for the entire year. I created a four-page plan for the year when I ditched my textbooks. Each page represented one of the four grading periods of the year. Each page contained a section for every week of the grading period. In each section, I listed:

- holidays, important school dates and any conflicts that might affect instruction;
- the theme covered in the unit;
- activities, projects and discussions;
- academic standards and policies incorporated; and
- any assessments (formative or summative)

After these unit plans are created, they are a great reference for creating daily lesson plans. Some teachers will want to create daily plans ahead of time to set plans for the year ahead of time. Others will want to plan a week or two at a time to allow for modification of plans based on changing pace, remediation and other factors.

When the flight plan is written and the pre-flight checklist is complete, it's time to figure out what to do with all those passengers – your students! With changes in technology and culture, today's students are very different in some ways than

## **Included in my “flight plan”:**

- Holidays/  
important  
school dates
- Unit theme
- Activities/  
projects/  
discussions
- Standards and  
policies
- Assessments

those of even a few years ago.

Digital devices – smartphones, tablets, laptops and others – and various tools on the Web have changed the mindset of this entire generation and much of the world. Some claim that they negatively affects attention spans, delayed gratification and interpersonal communication. We want it all, and we want it now.

Thankfully, our digital world now has plenty of resources – many of them free – that create instructional opportunities that never could have existed before. Technology initiatives like iPads or laptop computers for every student make accessing these tools easier than ever. Many students have been interacting digitally before they were able to walk. They’re comfortable living in their digital worlds, and we can take the instruction to them there.

Even if you don’t have ready access to those devices, it’s still possible to connect to students in a way that feels technologically comfortable to them. In-class activities and assignments can be customized to have digitally-compatible elements. That way, learning experiences are still engaging students in a way that feels natural to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills they’ve developed.

In the next section, we’ll examine some ideas for the classroom that promote ditching the textbook and meeting students where they are.

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# OTHER IDEAS

## AND CONSIDERATIONS

Ditching the textbook and teaching your own way is easiest for teachers that don't have other classes feeding in from lower levels or leading up to higher levels. It's also easiest for teachers that don't have other colleagues teaching the same classes. In other words, the less that other classes and courses depend on what you do in yours, the easier the textbook ditching becomes.

My personal situation was an ideal one for ditching my textbooks. High school Spanish has no prerequisite classes. In my small school district, I'm the only teacher of any world language. (Makes my department meetings very simple!) I teach all levels of Spanish for all students who want to take it at my high school, which has about 200 students. Major changes to my curriculum don't have the far-reaching effects that they do in more complicated situations.

However, that doesn't preclude you from ditching textbooks if you're in a school with multiple teachers in your content area. Classes with higher or lower levels aren't excluded, either. The range of content to be covered in those classes will be more limited to the prescribed curriculum. In fact, teachers in that situation can use their textbooks as a guide, modifying, removing, adding and adjusting as necessary.

Nevertheless, teaching a class using the "ditch that textbook" method opens teachers and students up to freedom and opportunities for creativity. Those opportunities might not have existed from teaching by the textbook chapter-by-chapter. In the end, those limitations shouldn't be crippling and should

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open everyone up to more relevant, engaging and exciting learning.

The amount of time you spend creating your textbook-less environment is important. In the end, it doesn't pay to rush. Take your time. When you create a new unit, give yourself time to think about how you really want it to look.

At a conference, I heard a speaker suggest that teachers create new multi-week units one year at a time. That didn't sound like enough time to me, so I jumped into the process with both feet. I revamped my curriculum for three levels in a matter of months. I made unit plans, created essential questions and even did some basic lesson planning.

I wish I hadn't gone so fast. Later, I looked over the planning I did in such a hurry. All of the lessons looked the same. There weren't multiple unique units. They were practically the same unit copied and pasted with some adjustments.

My advice isn't to do one unit a year. For me, with four levels of Spanish with six to eight units in each, I would have the curriculum I envisioned in 24 to 32 years. (For the record, I don't plan on teaching high school Spanish in 32 years. I envision playing more golf and enjoying time with my grandchildren.)

My advice is to create new units thoughtfully and to think of them individually.

Some units are easier to plan than others, just by the nature of their content and your level of comfort. Momentum is a powerful force. When planning units, I've found that starting your planning with units you're more comfortable with – easier ones to complete – gets you on a roll. There's a magic to checking items off your list. It can encourage you to keep going, that you're making progress to your goal.

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# **ACTIVITIES AND ASSIGNMENTS**

# LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

**T**eenagers live on social media. Of course, you probably didn't need a book to tell you that. According to a 2012 Common Sense Media survey of over 1,000 13- to 17-year-olds:

- 90 percent of America's teens have used social media
- 75 percent have a profile on a social media site
- 51 percent visit social media sites every day

What are they doing there? Well, among other activities, they're connecting with friends. Sharing photos and videos. Meeting people. Talking about issues important to them.

They know the ins and outs of posting to social media. They know how to get subtleties across to others in short online messages. They know how to manipulate media and share it on many platforms.

If this is where they live, why can't take education and meet them there?

Learning management systems (LMS) take the best aspects of social media and make them available to teachers and students for educational gain.

Groups. Discussion boards. Chats. Photo and video sharing. Calendars.

This educational social media is constantly evolving. The top learning management systems are making updates and adding new features constantly.

Some of the top options for managing learning online include:

1. Edmodo ([www.edmodo.com](http://www.edmodo.com)) – It's free, web-based and

## **Why learning management systems are powerful:**

- 90 percent of America's teens have used social media.
- 75 percent have a profile on social media
- 51 percent visit social media daily

very powerful. Edmodo has a parent account option, keeping parents in the loop with grades, missing assignments, messages and more.

2. My Big Campus ([www.mybigcampus.com](http://www.mybigcampus.com)) – My Big Campus was first made available to schools using Lightspeed Systems' Internet protection options. Now it's available to teachers and students worldwide. It includes iOS and Android mobile apps.

3. Moodle ([www.moodle.org](http://www.moodle.org)) – This open-source, non-commercial system must be installed on a server to be used. Many schools have their own Moodle servers, but free public Moodle servers exist (like at Rose-Hulman PRISM).

4. Schoology ([www.schoology.com](http://www.schoology.com)) – Schoology is a free learning management system with paid premium add-ons. It was developed by three students still in college who used it to share notes.

Options for learning management systems are plenty, and so are the reasons for using them:

1. Teachers who deploy an LMS open their classes to learning 24 hours a day.
2. Students and teachers can connect via private messages on sensitive issues.
3. Messages can be broadcast to all students with a single click.
4. Students can collaborate in a variety of instant communications.

These are skills that students are very comfortable with. Think about it: they've honed these skills and spent time in these digital places for years of their lives. If it's the learning we want them to get, maybe we can be flexible in our mode of delivering it to them. When it's time for instruction, let's move

### **Some learning management systems:**

1. Edmodo
2. My Big Campus
3. Moodle
4. Schoology

into their digital lives so they'll be able to concentrate on what we want them to learn.

## DISCUSSION BOARDS

Discussion boards really do highlight what we know and love about the modern Internet.

They're instant.

Anyone can join the discussion (most of the time).

We create and interact with content instead of just consuming it.

That's why they're perfect for classroom use. They hit many of our students' strengths. Many of our students have never known of information sources where they couldn't interact. (Except maybe those pesky textbooks.)

And they're very accessible. Many learning management systems already feature them. They're easy to set up. They're easy to monitor. And the student collaboration possibilities are huge.

Discussion boards are even available for the less-than-tech-savvy educators. It's called flip chart paper. Butcher paper. Chalkboards. The "graffiti on the wall" concept. Pose a question and let students discuss.

Here are some ideas for using discussion boards in the classroom:

1. Student opinions on content. After studying a concept, let students talk about it. There's a lot we can learn from this collaboration — what they don't understand, what stimulates them, what we left out of our teaching, etc. It may also encourage some peer teaching, which we know can often be more effective than teacher instruction.

### Why discussion boards?

- They're instant
- Anyone can join
- They're based on creation/interaction.
- They're accessible.
- They're easy to set up.

2. Hypothesizing. Take an idea from your curriculum and turn it on its head. How would life be now if the Cuban Missile Crisis hadn't been resolved? What how would the story be different if the main character hadn't died that tragic death? This touches on some of the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.

3. Vocabulary practice. Let students create a story together using new vocabulary — one line at a time, adapting to each other's posts. Post a picture and have students write creative sentences/thoughts about it using vocabulary. Play with language.

4. Quiz show. Have students develop their own questions for each other from material you've been covering. They pose them to each other and answer in the comments section.

5. Anticipating. Stop in the middle of a story or chapter and, before proceeding, have students anticipate what is coming next. History, literature and so many other things we examine in school have such strong ties to students' lives. Let them (or help them) make those connections.

6. Solving problems. Students can tackle the problems of the world, big and small through discussion boards. Pose a question relevant to what you're covering and have them present well developed solutions.

7. Support. Offering a discussion board for students to ask questions about homework, a reading or a topic from class discussion opens up a potentially 24-hour help desk. Students can help students, or the teacher can provide help, too.

Regardless of the activity you choose, it's a good idea to keep a close eye on what students are saying in these discussion boards. This helps to ensure the integrity of your activity (avoiding student talk about how the cheerleaders look in their new uniforms). It also protects you and your students from the

## **How to use discussion boards:**

1. Student opinions
2. Hypothesizing
3. Vocab practice
4. Quiz show
5. Anticipating
6. Solving problems
7. Support

repercussions of inappropriate posts.

How do you grade these discussion boards? Some teachers require a number of posts or comments. A rubric could be developed to pinpoint your expectations for students. Or it could simply be a class discussion tool for no credit or extra credit.

When done well, discussion boards are meaningful, interesting activities that take little preparation time and engage students.

## CHATS AND BACKCHANNELS

The first educational backchannels were probably notes.

You know, the kind of notes you passed down a row of desks to a friend during class. They might have been folded and tucked in a fancy way, if they were good at that kind of thing.

The contents: comments about what was going on in class at that time. Opinions about something.

Information that simply HAD to be shared at that particular moment.

Those kinds of notes are becoming more and more obsolete. OK, they're probably still being sent in the form of text messages in hoodie pockets. But they're becoming more obsolete because teachers are claiming those channels of communication for themselves.

Classes are engaging in backchannel discussions during a variety of events where students are processing information, making sense of it and forming opinions on it.

A backchannel is a separate (often text-based) discussion that students engage in while they're receiving information via

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**Classes are engaging in back-channel discussions during a variety of events where students are processing information, making sense of it and forming opinions on it.**

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a lecture, a movie, a TV show or a PowerPoint presentation. Students, armed with a digital device, participate in a behind-the-scenes chat so as not to disturb others trying to listen.

Backchannels are perfect for students who won't participate in class discussions but have something to say. When everyone participates, it lowers their inhibitions and gives them courage to join in. Plus, when everyone types at the same time, there's less time spent calling on students one by one.

Lots of great services exist to facilitate backchannel discussions:

1. TodaysMeet – This very simple site provides a chat room with minimal steps for joining and participating. Users go to the chat room, enter a screen name and can begin chatting with the group. There's no moderating, so anything a user types is automatically posted to the group. Chat room names can be customized as long as they're not already in use.

2. Cel.ly – Cel.ly offers the same service but adds e-mail and text capabilities. Backchannel discussions can be set up to display on screen any new messages posted to the group via e-mail, text, the Cel.ly website or the app. Curated chats allow the moderator to decide what gets sent out to the group and what gets censored.

3. Backchannel Chat – This web-based backchannel site works much like TodaysMeet. Whereas the beauty of TodaysMeet is its simplicity, the advantage of Backchannel Chat is its advanced features. YouTube videos and Flickr photos display automatically in a Backchannel Chat room when the links are posted. Teachers can moderate chats, removing unwanted comments.

4. Chat features in learning management systems – Many

### **Some** **backchannels:**

1. TodaysMeet
2. Cel.ly
3. Backchannel Chat
4. Chats in LMSs

LMS (like Edmodo and My Big Campus) offer a chat option for class groups. If a class group is already established, students only need to log in and go to the class's chat room. The chat is sealed by the walls of the LMS, so no one from the outside world has a chance of getting in.

Backchannel chats can be used in a variety of ways inside and outside of classrooms. Students can converse during TV shows (presidential debates come to mind), movies or other presentations. They can provide their opinions and reactions as well as ask any questions they have.

Using backchannels may not totally eliminate those behind-the-teacher's-back notes or text messages.

But they might encourage student collaboration unlike anything they've experienced.

## GETTING PERSONAL

I was a yearbook adviser for several years and was the editor of my high school yearbook staff. I believe that working on student publications allows for learning that students can't easily get anywhere else.

Here's a key yearbook lesson that I'm sure my students are glad that I learned.

What's the first thing you look for when you open a new yearbook?

Answer: You.

We are important to ourselves. We're concerned about our image. We're concerned about how we look and sound to people (even if we don't outwardly admit it).

Think our students are any different? I teach high school students, and if that's not a major egocentric time of life, then

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**We are important to ourselves. We're concerned about how we look and sound to people. Think our students are any different?**

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my hairline isn't disappearing like a setting sun.

If our students want to find themselves when they open a yearbook, wouldn't they want to find themselves in our instruction?

Blaine Ray, the creator of a conversational method of teaching world languages, says that we'll know students are listening if we're talking about them.

"They will pay attention better and they will remember what you have taught better," he writes in his book "Fluency Through TPR Storytelling". "Bring in events from their lives. Have mini-stories contain important school events or national events. Talk about food the students eat. This is all part of 'personalization.'"

As a world languages teacher, I can talk about practically anything in my classes as long as it's using vocabulary and grammar concepts that we've covered or that they can figure out on their own. So, from time to time, I'll make up stories in class with my students as the stars.

We'll talk about things that are important to them. One day, the start of school was delayed two hours due to fog, so one of my classes and I talked about that a bit.

I don't like using worksheets and activities out of textbooks. (Surprise, surprise, right?) When I need something like that, I prefer to write my own content, and often, my students are the main characters. Their lives are the plotline. If I have multiple class periods of the same subject, it just takes a "find and replace" in Microsoft Word to change the names.

Personalizing activities in a class is pretty easy in world languages, but it certainly applies to other areas of study.

Social studies teachers can equate the conflict and social ramifications of historical events to students' lives.

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**If our students want to find themselves when they open a yearbook, wouldn't they want to find themselves in our instruction?**

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Science teachers can personalize processes and concepts by having students act them out or by comparing them to their own lives (“mitochondria are kind of like the Red Bull that Jack drinks to stay awake playing Skyrim”).

Literature has so many parallels to our students’ social lives that we can often personalize what we read pretty easily.

Obviously, we should be careful when we personalize. Embarrassing our students is the last thing we want to do, and discretion is the key when selecting topics to discuss.

But, when done well, personalizing is exciting and attention-grabbing. It’s a great way to ditch that textbook!

## **TEACHING VOCABULARY**

Learning vocabulary terms is a skill that crosses over all disciplines.

Every content area has its own unique set of terms. How well a student understands those terms often determines how well that student learns.

Vocabulary acquisition is the learning before the learning. If you don’t get it, you’re at a significant disadvantage.

Thankfully, there are great strategies for helping students remember vocabulary terms.

Thankfully, they don’t have to rely on canned practice questions from a textbook.

Here are four valuable ideas for helping students remember new vocabulary terms:

– Memory hooks — Also known as mnemonic devices, memory hooks help students make memorable connections between something new and something that’s already familiar.

I often spend valuable class time creating and helping stu-

### **Ways to help students remember vocabulary:**

1. Memory hooks
2. Vocab grouping
3. Digital flash cards
4. White board drills

dents create memory hooks, and that time yields great results. It turns long lists of tough-to-remember vocabulary into recognizable words tied to memory connections we made in class.

I often ask students, “What does it sound like, look like or make you think of?” When they create their own connections — or hear connections that their peers have created — they make that cognitive link they need to remember new material.

– Vocabulary grouping — This is a very basic but useful exercise. Long lists of vocabulary are made much more manageable when broken into smaller sections. A list of 25 terms seems more daunting than five smaller lists of five words each. It's even less daunting when those five-word lists are grouped under a descriptive category (i.e. birds, spicy foods, green things, etc.).

Think-pair-share is a good in-class activity with these groups. It can be used as an effective bell-ringer activity or when presenting new vocabulary. When students hear groups created by classmates, connections can be made that otherwise wouldn't be made.

– Quizlet or traditional flash cards — The repetition from traditional flash cards is still as effective as it has been for generations. But now, the drill can be made a little less tedious.

Websites like Quizlet allow teachers AND students to create their own vocabulary lists on the site. Students can practice their words in simple flash card form, take basic quizzes and even play games with their own content. (I wrote a review of six digital flashcard tools and chose a favorite in this blog post: <http://ditchthattextbook.com/2013/03/14/flip-flip-flip-who-is-king-of-online-flashcards/>)

Take it to the next level by subscribing to Quia, a website

### **Six free digital flashcard tools:**

1. StudyBlue
2. Flashcard Machine
3. Quizlet
4. Flashcard Exchange
5. Study Stack
6. Brain Flips

with tons of interactive games for teacher-created vocabulary lists. Quia games are Flash-based and visually appealing. Students can play some games alone and others with a partner.

– White board drills, traditional AND digital — These classroom staples are great for any classroom. If you don't have lap whiteboards already and don't have the cash to get some, laminated copy paper will work in a pinch (although they don't always erase completely clean!).

To take white board drills to the next century, use a class chat room. Available in some educational social media, students can access the chat room and for a question-and-answer session (see the chapter on chats and backchannels).

Ask a question to the class and have them type answers into the chat window without hitting “enter” to send the message to the group. When you're ready for students to show their answers to the class, have them hit “enter” at the same time. They'll see each other's answers on their own screens.

If you have an LCD projector in your room, you can project their answers so you can point and make comments or speak generally about the class's body of work.

## **DIGITAL MEDIA IDEAS**

Creating media used to be so out of reach for educators and students.

Making video and audio used to require an expensive recording device, tapes and expensive machines for editing it. Distributing it to others was totally out of the question, aside from dubbing to new videotapes (another expense) and handing them out or mailing them.

Photography was expensive, too, and it was complicated.

Cameras. Film. Developing. Hoping that the images you took were well composed and exposed properly. Enlarging. Contact prints.

It's amazing to think that yesterday's video studios and darkrooms are in the pockets of our students today. Cell phones and tablets are powerful media creation tools. Digital cameras can compose beautiful, high-resolution images that can be shared with others in seconds. Video presentations that were reserved for well funded professionals can now be created by anyone.

Google Voice has empowered students and teachers to gather digital audio with one of the simplest, most accessible technology tools available: the telephone. A free Google Voice account assigns users their own personal phone number with a voice mail account and text messaging. Students can call that Google Voice number from any land line or cellular phone and record messages. Those messages can be downloaded as mp3 files and added to a podcast, video, website or more.

With such powerful digital tools at our disposal, we can ditch the traditional paper and pencil for something more modern from time to time (or even more frequently).

Here are 15 ways you can infuse some creativity and innovation in your lessons through digital media:

1. Traditional lesson questions: Haven't ditched that textbook completely yet? Put a new twist on a common practice. Have students answer textbook lesson questions by voice instead of by pencil. Grading may take a bit longer, but the change of pace may inspire.

2. Audio essays: Give students a chance to make their case verbally. Audio essays – whether the 30-second or multiple-minute variety – let students inform and persuade verbally,

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**It's amazing to think that yesterday's video studios and darkrooms are in the pockets of our students today.**

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a skill they will likely need in the workforce.

3. Interviews: There are so many directions this can be taken. Students can interview their friends for their opinions about topics from class. They can delve into their own genealogy with family. They could even interview community experts on a research topic.

4. Debates: This takes interviews to the next level. Students get a topic from class and find one or more classmates. They grab a cell phone (or land line phone) and dig in for a discussion.

5. Poetry reading: Make poetry assignments come to life. Students can write their own poetry and recite it, or they can give their own interpretation of a poem the class is studying.

6. Speak for a character: Let students interpret what a character in history, in a story or in anything involved with your class would say. How would Juliet describe her sticky family situation? What would Adam Smith say about the state of our economy? How would a Haitian describe her daily life and struggles?

7. Directions: Give geography mapping activities a new look by having students give directions from one place to another. Include important cities or landmarks they should know. Creativity reigns!

8. Tour guide: This is similar to the directions activity. Students study an important place and take tourists on a verbal tour, identifying people, places and things and injecting information along the way.

9. Predicting the future: Based on what's happened in the past and what students have learned in class, what do they think the future will be like?

10. Songs, raps, chants or cheers: These can be fun to

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**Speak for a character: Let students interpret what a character in history or in a story would say.**

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write and even more fun to perform. Make sure they tie back to class content, of course.

11. How did you solve it?: When students hear their peers explain how they've reached a solution on a problem in math, science or any other class, they might be more receptive to hearing it. However, student explanations can have mistakes (sometimes serious mistakes), so checking answers before recording might be a good idea.

12. Talk show: Students take the role of talk show host, taking call-in questions, discussing issues with their co-hosts or talking to guests.

13. Game show: Hosts ask the questions and contestants answer them for fabulous prizes. Celebrity guests could make things interesting!

14. A call home to Mom: Students could leave a message for their parents or siblings, explaining an interesting place they've visited, an interesting event they've witnessed or talking about something that's on their mind. Tie it into a theme from class and you get conversational, easy-to-understand explanations of your class content.

15. Surprise question: Leave a question that students must answer on the outgoing message. The catch: Students don't know the question until they call! This can be a kind of pop quiz and an opportunity to think on their feet.

**Talk shows and game shows get students creative and creating.**

## **STUDENT BLOGGING**

My students love to tweet. They share photos on Instagram. They know all the cool viral videos on YouTube.

They are expert digital collaborators, connecting with others to discuss topics near and dear to their hearts.

That's why I love to have them blog. Blogs are the equivalent to an online journal (born from the term "web log," where programmers logged changes they made to websites). Bloggers create posts, kind of like online articles, about a specific topic. They then publish them to their blog – their online writing home – for others to read.

Educational blogging gives students some online real estate where they can express their ideas and share them with others. They can provoke discussion and debate about topics that might not otherwise happen in an oral in-class discussion. Blogs provide opportunities to practice the skill of writing on a regular basis, especially if students blog on a schedule like the pros do.

Many blog coaches suggest some basics about the format of a blog post. Of course, most of these ideas can be discarded completely, but they're a good starting point.

- Use simple sentences.
- Use short paragraphs.
- Break text up with lists and other visuals.
- Start in a way that catches the reader's attention.
- Include your own personal experiences and opinions.
- Cite the source of your facts.
- End with a question, asking the reader to write a comment or take some sort of action.

Teachers must decide how public they want to make student blogs. Some prefer student blogs that the world can see. That opens students up to a world of readers and potentially a world of comments to create discussion.

It also opens them up to some risks, including being identified by predators. There are steps to take to mitigate those risks, though, like removing personally identifying information

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**Educational blogging gives students some online real estate where they can express their ideas and share them with others.**

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from the blogs (name, hometown, etc.) and keeping student faces from being published. Teachers who use student blogs have varying policies and philosophies on the amount of student information they use.

Teachers have varying views on whether student blogs should be public or private. Sue Waters of edublogs.org posed that question to Twitter followers in this discussion (<http://storify.com/suewaters/edublogs-commonly-asked-question-should-class-and>) and got plenty of feedback. The majority of responding teachers praised public student blogs. They liked when teachers moderate student posts and public comments. They allow students to write to a wide, authentic audience. They also liked that parents could connect to their children's work through blog reading and commenting.

To help students speak to as wide an audience as possible, a resource called Comments4Kids was created to connect real-world audiences with student blogs. Teachers can add their students' blogs to a list at [comments4kids.blogspot.com](http://comments4kids.blogspot.com) or post links via Twitter with the hashtag #comments4kids. As other people find student blogs and read them, they can leave comments to encourage, praise, ask follow-up questions or add extra information.

Student blogs can be hosted in a variety of places online. Three of the most popular include:

1. Edublogs ([www.edublogs.org](http://www.edublogs.org)) – This site allows students to create free blogs if a teacher has a Educator Pro account (\$7.95/mo or \$39.95/yr). Students and teachers can create posts and pages. Teachers can decide whether content is published before it goes live. Plus, it has mobile apps to support posts from several digital devices.

2. Kidblog ([www.kidblog.org](http://www.kidblog.org)) – Kidblog covers all the basic

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**Comments4Kids was created to connect real-world audiences with student blogs.**

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functions and makes everything free. That includes student accounts, teacher accounts and even parent accounts so they can comment and keep up on student work. Teachers have control over everything, and mobile apps are available as well.

3. Blogger ([www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com)) – This Google-owned blog site is an option for some schools that offer students Google Apps for Education. Other schools may have it on their "blocked for blogs/forums" list. Blogger is simple and powerful, and it's used by many high-powered professional bloggers. When used with Google Apps for Education, teachers have control over student work.

Convinced? Need to work the kinks out of your plans to let students blog? Never fear. In the next chapter, we cover 20 things you should think about before launching student blogs.

## TOP 20 BLOG CONSIDERATIONS

Here are some things to consider as students write content online:

1. Write about class and more: Connections to and opinions about class content are great, especially if students discuss via comments. But we're missing a great opportunity if we limit it to that. Kids don't automatically reflect on their lives and what's important to them. Their blog in your class may be their only opportunity.

2. Open-topic posts are good: Richard Byrne of Free Tech for Teachers suggested that students reflect on what they've learned that week in a simple blog post. It could be open to all classes or just from your content area.

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**Kids don't automatically reflect on their lives and what's important to them. Their blog in your class may be their only opportunity.**

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3. Go to their world: So what do they write about? Try to meet students in their world as much as possible. Making content touch their own lives is a connection that can last a lifetime. Pop culture, music, sports, etc. Listen to what they talk about in class. Example: How does one of their own relationships mirror the relationship that two characters from your class have?

4. Let students pick: Open the floor for writing prompt suggestions. You might be surprised at the kinds of creative, relevant connections they make.

5. Teamwork works: Encourage students to connect with each other in their posts to make them more personal, and not just in the comments they leave. Q&A interviews and polls work well.

6. Do your homework: Encourage (or require) students to link facts in their posts to real-world sources. Hyperlink webpages. Cite hard-copy texts. Use direct quotes when citing a classmate's opinion.

7. Encourage readability: Good blog writing crosses over from the "real world" to the classroom. Catchy introductions. A "what's it about" paragraph early on. Bullet points and lists. Short paragraphs. Simple sentences. Conclusions with questions.

8. Reward out-of-class blogging: I believe in making student blogs a place where students want to go at home and on the go. I'm interested in trying incentives for after-hours activity (i.e. extra points/privileges, polls/games for interest, etc.) Real-time blog responses to events (i.e. school activities, news, etc.) can do this.

9. It takes time: I've found that rushing students to write and comment leads to shallow content. A little time can en-

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**Making content touch their own lives is a connection that can last a lifetime.**

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courage a great digital conversation.

10. Emphasize clean copy: Online writing doesn't mean text-messaging writing conventions, and some students might miss that point if you don't bring it up. Solid spelling, grammar and idea development gives them credibility in the eyes of their readers.

11. But don't nitpick: Avoid the temptation to correct every spelling and grammar error. Real-life blog readers don't do that (not much at least!). Plus, it discourages their creativity and initiative. If a spelling/grammar pattern emerges, consider addressing it privately.

12. Good comments are key: Well-thought-out comments are online conversation jewels. Good ones add ideas/information to the discussion, insert personal experiences, provide insightful links/quotes, ask follow-up questions, etc.

13. Choose a stance on comments: I can see two schools of thought on comments: quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative stance has countable requirements (comments, words, etc.). It can assure participation but promotes an "I have to" mentality. The qualitative stance values quality of discussion over quantity but may result in less participation. A mix of both may be the best option.

14. Create respect: The lack of face-to-face communication in online discussions makes it easy to forget that real people actually read what we write. Students can become brazen with harsh comments if they don't remember the peers they're addressing. Civility should rule.

15. High-five good work: Find ways to promote quality blog posts and comments outside of the student blog. Mention them or post them in class. Add them to the class webpage. Include them in school newsletters. The sky is the limit.

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**Well-thought-out comments are online conversation jewels. Good ones add ideas/information to the discussion, insert personal experiences, provide insightful links/quotes, ask follow-up questions, etc.**

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16. Decide on privacy: Public student blogs can open children to the harshness and dangers of the real world, but they offer an authentic, global audience. Students thrive on outside-of-school comments. Link to student blog posts on Twitter with the #comments4kids hashtag to open them to a huge worldwide audience.

17. Find a medium: There are plenty of potential homes for your students' blogs. Richard Byrne lists several in this post (<http://www.freetch4teachers.com/2013/03/picking-best-platform-for-your.html>). They range from the basic (Kidblog, Edublogs, Blogger) to the complex (self-hosted WordPress).

18. Break the economic barrier: Students without home Internet access are at a disadvantage. Help them find Internet time in school (study hall, library time, computer lab time, before/after school time) or out of school (at a library, a friend's house, etc.). A phone call or e-mail to a parent could uncover the answer.

19. Cumulative products are good: Find an end-of-the-year product students can create using their blog posts. They could create a book (print or PDF ebook), derive a Weebly website, compile a top-10 list of posts or comments.

20. Reflection is good, too: When students look over their work for a year, they can see how they've grown as a writer, a learner and a person. They relearn important lessons. They combat the "I didn't learn anything in that class" mindset.

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**Find an end-of-the-year product students can create using their blog posts.**

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# **DIGITAL TOOLS**

**T**he landscape of digital tools is vast. Finding what to use and knowing how to use them is often half the battle.

Below are 24 useful sites and apps that will give you options as you ditch that textbook:

**1. Backchannel Chat ([www.backchannelchat.com](http://www.backchannelchat.com))** – The "raise your hand and answer in front of everyone" approach doesn't work for all students. Sometimes, it takes a different tactic to get students to participate. Backchannel Chat lets students type answers and display them in a chat room. Teachers can moderate comments, removing anything unnecessary or inappropriate.

**2. Storybird ([www.storybird.com](http://www.storybird.com))** – Sometimes, students need a nudge in the right direction to start writing. (OK, maybe more like a shove.) Storybird is a storytelling site that boasts beautiful, original artwork that can give young authors inspiration to create. Students can create their own "storybirds," or online books, using the Storybird artwork. They can share their creations online, and if they like them enough, they can even publish them in a hardback book.

**3. Cel.ly ([www.cel.ly](http://www.cel.ly))** – Backchannel Chat allows students to participate in class without saying a word orally. Cel.ly takes it a step further. With Cel.ly, teachers can moderate a back-channel discussion via Internet, text message and/or e-mail. Students join the class's cell and are able to receive instant messages or vote in user-created polls. Cel.ly is also great for keeping in touch with parents or sending reminders about assignments or tests.

**4. Evernote ([www.evernote.com](http://www.evernote.com))** – The elephant remembers everything. So does Evernote. This notetaking app/website has redefined how I take notes and store information.

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**Evernote – The elephant remembers everything. So does Evernote. This notetaking app/website has redefined how I take notes and store information.**

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Notes typed in Evernote can be titled, filed in notebooks, searched and shared. Entire web pages can be clipped and copied into Evernote to be viewed later. It syncs notes across several platforms: the desktop/laptop computer program, iOS and Android apps: "nearly every computer, phone and mobile device out there," according to the website. Notetaking just took a turn toward more productive.

**5. Penultimate ([www.evernote.com/penultimate](http://www.evernote.com/penultimate))** – If taking smartphone/tablet notes with a keyboard isn't your favorite idea, another app from Evernote may suit your fancy. Penultimate is a handwriting app, giving users free reign over the entire page to write, doodle, create charts and more. Plus, handwriting recognition can read your handwriting (well, assuming it's legible), making it searchable. Notes can be shared with teachers or classmates as e-mail, a web link, a picture file and more.

**6. Skitch ([www.evernote.com/skitch](http://www.evernote.com/skitch))** – The Evernote love keeps coming. What Penultimate is to paper, Skitch is to photos. Skitch gives users the power to mark-up digital photos. Draw shapes. Add arrows. Write text. Highlight with color. Skitch will share those edited photos easily through a variety of digital channels. Skitch turns homework and instruction visual and portable.

**7. Any QR code generator (search for "QR code generator")** – QR codes (quick response codes) are like the bar codes on products we buy. When scanned with a QR code reader, they display text, visit a website or more. Teachers can use QR code generators to produce, among other things, clues to educational games, additional information about any topic, or a visit to a relevant website. QR codes can often be copied digitally into educational materials or printed.

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**Skitch – Skitch gives users the power to mark-up digital photos. Draw shapes. Add arrows. Write text. Highlight with color.**

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8. Any QR code reader (search for "QR code reader") – For students to access the content from the aforementioned QR codes, they would need a QR code reader for their mobile devices. Many QR code reader options exist.

9. Dropbox ([www.dropbox.com](http://www.dropbox.com)) – Many "I don't have my ..." excuses can be obliterated with Dropbox. Dropbox is online storage space for virtually any file. Once a Dropbox account is created, users can upload their files using computer and mobile device applications. Those files are saved "in the cloud" and are accessible through almost any Internet-ready device. Dropbox files can be shared with others. This benefits teachers (share instructional materials with students) and students (share assignments with teachers when completed).

10. DROPitTome ([www.dropitto.me](http://www.dropitto.me)) – Make your "turn homework in here" tray digital. DROPitTome allows anyone online to send a file securely to a specified Dropbox account. Teachers create an account and receive a unique web address for their DROPitTome account. Students visit that web address, select their file and upload it to the teacher's Dropbox. Imagine all the trees (and time) you could save by requiring students to send research papers to a Dropbox account instead of printing them!

11. Khan Academy ([www.khanacademy.org](http://www.khanacademy.org)) – If you want to learn something about math or science, there's probably a video at Khan Academy that can teach you. (That goes for economics, computer science and a handful of other disciplines.) Khan Academy leads users step-by-step from the basic to the complex and rewards work with points and badges. Khan Academy's 4,000+ videos can be used by students that need some extra help, students that want to get ahead, or teachers that want to supplement their instruction.

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**DROPitTome – Make your “turn homework in here” tray digital. DROPitTome allows anyone to send a file securely to a specified Dropbox account.**

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12. Bubbl.us ([www.bubbl.us](http://www.bubbl.us)) – Mind maps are great tools for organizing ideas. Bubbl.us gives students a place online to gather and sort class content. Bubbles can be linked. Different levels of bubbles (in different colors) can be created. Students can save their work in a bubbl.us account and send a link to it, embed it in a web page, or allow other bubbl.us users to access it.

13. Quizlet ([www.quizlet.com](http://www.quizlet.com)) – The repetition from traditional flash cards is still as effective as it has been for generations. But now, the drill can be made a little less tedious. Flashcard websites like Quizlet allow teachers AND students to create their own vocabulary lists. Students can practice their words in simple flash card form, take basic quizzes and even play games with their own content. Practice options change slightly based on the platform (computer via Internet, mobile web and iOS app).

14. Weebly ([education.weebly.com](http://education.weebly.com)) – Designing basic websites has become simple, accessible and free. Weebly gives students and teachers the power to publish content on the web and interact with those that view it. Post text or photos. Embed video or audio. Create "contact me" forms and surveys for readers. Write in a blog. Publish for free using a "yoursite.weebly.com" or make it a paid site with an inexpensive "yoursite.com" domain. Weebly for Education allows teachers to manage student accounts. Weebly (and other website creation sites) turns projects from "teacher's/class's eyes only" to "visible to the world."

15. Classtools ([www.classtools.net](http://www.classtools.net)) – Classtools offers teachers a wide-ranging suite of fun web apps for engaging students in many disciplines. Play four games with your own vocabulary terms using Arcade Game Generator. Create fake

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**Weebly — Designing basic websites has become simple, accessible and free. Weebly gives students and teachers the power to publish content on the web and interact with those that view it.**

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Facebook profiles for historical figures or book characters using Fakebook. Its Fake SMS creates fake text message conversations, and Fake Tweet creates fake Twitter messages.

Teacher resources include an easy QR code generator (see No. 7 above), a plagiarism checker and a countdown timer. That's just a taste of the 29 options offered to teachers and students at Classtools.

**16. Twitter ([www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com))** – Twitter is so much more than telling everyone what you had for breakfast or what you're watching on TV in 140 characters or less. It's an enormously powerful social-connection behemoth. It makes anyone with a Twitter account potentially accessible. Scientists. Authors. Programmers. Historians. Political figures. Are these the kind of people you'd like to see your students interacting with? Gathering first-hand information from? That doesn't even include the vast professional growth opportunity Twitter offers. Leverage Twitter and harness power.

**17. Google Docs/Google Drive ([drive.google.com](http://drive.google.com))** – This is a pretty well-known one in education and beyond. It's so powerful. If you haven't dabbled in it, try it. Create written documents, spreadsheets, presentations and drawings. Save them online. Store virtually any file. Access them all anywhere with an Internet connection. Share files with others. Edit files in real time, even if other people have them open. Start with 5GB of free storage space. Even if you don't teach at an official Google Apps for Education school, try it. Use it.

**18. Audacity ([audacity.sourceforge.net](http://audacity.sourceforge.net))** – Audacity is a powerful, free audio editing program. Users can gather audio clips, blend them into one track, add effects and create a professional-sounding audio file. Audacity can be used to create podcasts, audio for presentations and more. There's a bit of a

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**Twitter – It's an enormously powerful social-connection behemoth. It makes anyone with a Twitter account potentially accessible.**

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learning curve to getting the hang of it (especially if you're not familiar with audio editing), but there's a lot you can do with just the basics.

**19. Google Earth ([earth.google.com](http://earth.google.com))** – Google Earth is a virtual field trip to anywhere on the globe. After downloading the Google Earth program onto your computer, it allows you to view aerial photography and maps of the entire earth, zoomable to the point where individual houses can be seen. 3D imagery gives students a true bird's-eye view of cities and other landmarks. Museums and other landmarks can be viewed through a virtual walking tour. Students can use Google Earth on computers or they can watch on an LCD projector. Plus, resources for educators, including lesson plans, tutorials, tips and more, are available at [sitescontent.google.com/google-earth-for-educators](http://sitescontent.google.com/google-earth-for-educators).

**20. MakeBeliefsComix ([www.makebeliefscomix.com](http://www.makebeliefscomix.com))** – Who wouldn't like substituting comics for their traditional pen-and-pencil homework? This site allows students to create comic strips using the provided characters, speech bubbles and backgrounds. Students can create a series of strips for longer projects or a single one.

**21. Class Dojo ([www.classdojo.com](http://www.classdojo.com))** – This free website/app tracks and quantifies positive and negative student behavior. Create your own categories for positive and negative behaviors or use the pre-filled labels. Use a smartphone, tablet or computer to enter data. A simple two-click (or two-tap) process adds or subtracts points. Students and parents can access their accounts to see how their participation grade is. Behavior reports can be e-mailed to parents or invitation codes can be printed and sent home.

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**Class Dojo – This free website/app tracks and quantifies positive and negative behavior.**

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## 22. YouTube, TeacherTube and SchoolTube

([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), [www.teachertube.com](http://www.teachertube.com),

[www.schooltube.com](http://www.schooltube.com)) – Hopefully you’ve heard of YouTube and its education-focused cousins, Teacher Tube and School Tube. There’s plenty of content out there if you’re willing to go fishing to find it. The list of options is long. There are some very good student video projects produced for class credit and relevant professional videos that have been uploaded. Activities that can accompany these videos are often out there as well.

23. Planboard ([www.planboard.com](http://www.planboard.com)) – Planboard takes bound, paper-based lesson planning books to the 21st century. It works like a traditional lesson plan book but does everything online so you can access your lesson plans on any computer with Internet access. You can print lessons, create a PDF file, e-mail plans and link to them to share with other teachers. The free account includes unlimited plans and 500 MB of storage.

24. Explain Everything ([www.explaineverything.com](http://www.explaineverything.com)) – This iOS app is one-stop shopping for creating screencast videos. Record audio and a video of drawing or annotation on your screen. Write all over your photos as well as PDF, PowerPoint and Keynote files. When finished, export the videos as an mp4 file for students to view. All from the comfort of your iPad. This one does cost \$2.99 from the App Store.

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**Explain Everything – This iOS app is one-stop shopping for creating screencast videos. Record audio and a video of drawing or annotation on your screen.**

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# NEED MORE DITCH THAT TEXTBOOK?

- Follow the Ditch That Textbook blog ([DitchThatTextbook.com](http://DitchThatTextbook.com)). New articles are usually published Mondays and Thursdays about teaching with less reliance on the textbook with an emphasis on educational technology and creative teaching.
- Have a question that's not answered here? Contact Matt Miller directly by e-mail ([Matt@DitchThatTextbook.com](mailto:Matt@DitchThatTextbook.com)), Twitter ([@jmattmiller](https://twitter.com/jmattmiller)), Facebook ([facebook.com/DitchThatTextbook](https://facebook.com/DitchThatTextbook)) or Google+ (<http://gplus.to/jmattmiller>). Don't hesitate — he loves to help!
- Schedule Matt for your next professional development or conference! He has spoken to hundreds of educators about a variety of educational technology– and world language-related topics. Contact him using the contact information above. Check out sessions he has presented by going to [DitchThatTextbook.com](http://DitchThatTextbook.com) and selecting a session from the “Conferences” drop-down tab at the top of the screen.